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INTERVIEW WITH: WILLIAM WEBSTER, DIRECTOR, CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
 FRIDAY, MAY 24, 1991

MR. LEHRER: Another thing that's been much talked about since you announced your retirement is what about the CIA in the 1990s and going into the next century? Many people have suggested, in fact, that it may be obsolete, (that) it's an agency set up to combat the communist threat from the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc. That no longer exists, so what happens now? What do you think should be the new CIA and what it should be and what it should look like and what it should do?

JUDGE WEBSTER: I have to talk about the entire intelligence community, because CIA is only part of the effort, and a very important part — it's the Central Intelligence Agency. But others are participating in a look at the world that has changed dramatically. Even in the four years that I have been in office, it's changed dramatically. I think it has — intelligence — good intelligence has never been more essential than at the present time, but it's a different kind of need, and we are positioned to supply a different and, I think, more flexible and broadly based type of intelligence.

The Soviet Union is still an important object for examination. We need to have an encyclopedic understanding of a very dynamic and, in many ways, unsettling situation there as the various republics seek autonomy, as Gorbachev's future becomes more and more uncertain, as the far right strives to maintain order in ways that may not be reformist. And reformists are seeking to go the other way. So we've got to keep track of that. That's different than the old stand-up military ground war offensive threat that they posed for so many years.

Our indications and warnings now will give us up to three to four months before the Soviets could possibly engage in that type of threat. So the threat is less one of war against us, but an awareness that they possess important strategic weapons, the only country in the world capable of destroying us. We need to see what's going to happen to those weapons. We need to follow with arms control devices the agreements that our two countries have reached with each other on possession of strategic weapons.

So it's a different kind of focus, and all around the world we're seeing dramatic regional disputes. We're seeing opportunities

CONTINUEDPage 2

as Eastern European countries really work hard at reform and trying to achieve democracy. As we see bubbling in the continent of Africa, we see pressures in North and South Korea the old problems between India and Pakistan. There's no part of the world that does not implicate the national security of this country.

MR. LEHRER: But to implicate the national security is one thing, but to threaten the national security of this country there are not very many any of those countries you name could not threaten the national security of the United States, could they? Including the Soviet Union at this point?

JUDGE WEBSTER: Well, threat means something sudden and war. But we're looking at northern war these days. We're looking at economic competitiveness, how other countries support their own private sector in competition in the free market. We're looking at a number of national issues. Narcotics affects us all. You've called it a threat; I call it a threat to our national security, not only terms of what it does to our citizens, but the instability it causes countries that are friends of ours.

The proliferation of missiles, chemical weapons, biological weapons in the Third World to peace and therefore to our role in the world as the remaining superpower.

MR. LEHRER: You mentioned economic matters. Some countries already use their intelligence services to spy on the United States and other countries to get economic secrets. Do you think the CIA ought to get in that business?

JUDGE WEBSTER: The CIA ought to contribute to the understanding of our policymakers of the major economic factors taking place in the world. That is not industrial espionage. But it's important for us to know the strategies that mad your countries, affecting agreements. It's important for us to know the extent to which other countries are seeking to steal our secrets

MR. LEHRER: Well, they're doing it, aren't they, right and left?

JUDGE WEBSTER: Some are.

MR. LEHRER: Yeah.

JUDGE WEBSTER: You bet they are. And it's

MR. LEHRER: How does that work? I mean, the country actually sends the counterpart let's say well, I don't use any examples unless you will, but that's country 'x' wants to steal a some kind of computer secret from the United States. I mean, they actually send agent in here and do that. Do they not?

JUDGE WEBSTER: In the old days, the Soviet Union used surrogates out of the Warsaw Block countries to come, and they did it very effectively. Those groups are now largely on our side. So we have to look more carefully to see whether the KGB and the GRU is engaged in what we call technology transfer. Other countries are apt to get closer to industrial espionage by black bag jobs and searching of portfolios of businessmen traveling abroad. So it cuts both ways.

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MR. LEHRER: And you _ and the CIA is involved in that, right? I mean, in

JUDGE WEBSTER: We're not involved to do it like that.

MR. LEHRER: No, no. All right. I mean _

JUDGE WEBSTER: But we're involved _

MR. LEHRER: _ for counter

JUDGE WEBSTER: _ we and the FBI. The FBI has the primary responsibility in this country and does it beautifully.

MR. LEHRER: You were head of the FBI before you came to the CIA. A lot of people would suggest that there are actually more domestic threats to the security of this country right now social problems, crime, and other things _ than there are from outside. How would you weigh those?

JUDGE WEBSTER: Well, it's difficult for me to weigh. I'm not supposed to be collecting domestic intelligence.

MR. LEHRER: Right.

JUDGE WEBSTER: So I have to rely on talking to Judge Sessions and others. Clearly the threat of drugs, clearly the threat of organized crime _ and often organized crime involved in drugs _ major white-collar _ crime, major swindles that we're all aware of _ all of these affect the quality of life in this country. And that is part of the responsibility of the FBI. Some of the things that are domestic have major international connections, such as narcotics. And we link very closely these days with the FBI, and our cooperation with them has never been better in my view and in their view.

MR. LEHRER: Finally, personal _ what are your plans? What are you going to do now?

JUDGE WEBSTER: Well, you know, my roots have always been in the law, and my experiences have been heavily influenced by that, and I'm looking forward to practicing law and having more time to support legal institutions, organizations that I served in in the past.

MR. LEHRER: Stay here in Washington?

JUDGE WEBSTER: Stay here in Washington. Daniel Webster said that justice was a great interest of man on earth, and I think he was right.

MR. LEHRER: Are you going to write a tell-all memoir?

JUDGE WEBSTER: No plans to do that. No plans at all.

MR. LEHRER: Do you _ a lot of people who _ lay people would say, "My goodness, here is William Webster, who was head of the FBI, head of the CIA _ his head must be full of secrets." Are there things that you're going to carry out of office that are terrific burdens that you know that you think the American people should or should not _ I mean, are you burdened by heavy secrets and awful things that you know that other people don't know?

JUDGE WEBSTER: I am not burdened by heavy secrets, because all of the secrets that the American people would not want to know about are shared with the surrogate representatives, the special committees of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, who represent the American people in knowing that we're doing our business correctly and what the major threats to our national security are. The one thing I'm carrying out, but I suppose I'll give to my successor, is the key to the code of the statuary in the courtyard.

MR. LEHRER: I see.

JUDGE WEBSTER: That's a big burden.

MR. LEHRER: I see. Well, Mr. Webster, thank you very much for being with us, and good luck to you, sir.

JUDGE WEBSTER: Thank you, Jim. It's been a privilege.

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4.